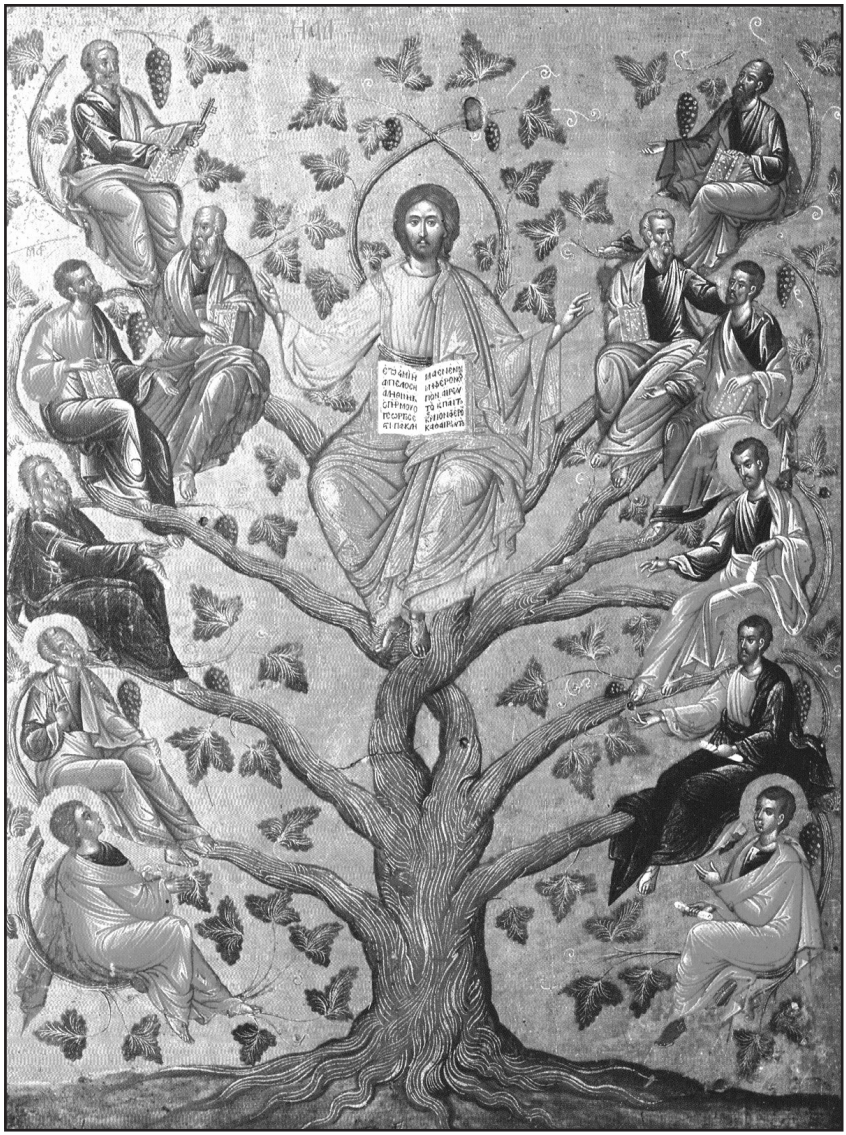

Icon of Christ the Vine, Byzantine Museum, 16th - 17th century.

Christ the Vine with the Apostles

I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. . . If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you (Jn. 15: 1-8).

CHAPTER 3

On Holy Tradition

Inquirer: What is the Holy Tradition that the Orthodox consider to be the second source of Holy Revelation and coequal with Holy Scripture?

Elder Cleopa: Holy Tradition is the teaching of the Church, God-given with a *living voice*, from which a portion was later written down. As with Holy Scripture, so too Holy Tradition contains Holy Revelation, and is, therefore, fundamental for our salvation. Holy Tradition is *the life of the Church in the Holy Spirit* and, consonant with the enduring life of the Church, is thus a wellspring of Holy Revelation such that, consequently, it possesses the same authority as Holy Scripture.

From the time of Adam until that of Abraham, according to the old chronologies, 3,678 years passed, and if we add 430 years when the Israelites remained in Egypt, we have 4,108 years. Throughout this period of time, Holy Scripture neither existed nor was the Sabbath considered as a feast among the people. During this period of many thousands of years, the faithful and chosen people were guided to the

path of salvation only by Holy Tradition, namely, from the teachings about God which they received from a living voice. Only for the duration of 1400 years—from the time of Moses until the advent of Christ—were they guided by the Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament.

Just as before the books of the Old Testament were written the people were guided in the knowledge of God and on the path of salvation only by Holy Tradition (Tradition with a living voice, orally), so too were they precisely before the writing of the books of the New Testament. The Holy Tradition was the guide by which the first Christians were directed to the path of salvation. The first to impart the teachings of the New Testament with a living voice to the ears of the people was our Saviour Jesus Christ Himself, who for three and a half years continually taught the people, distributing His Gospel without, however, writing anything. Inasmuch as He was carrying out obedience to His Father, He did not send His Apostles to write but to preach the Gospel to the whole world, saying to them: "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen." From the day of its establishment (33 AD) until the year 44 AD, when the Holy Apostle Matthew wrote the first Gospel[1], the Church was governed without the Scriptures of the New Testament, but only with the Holy Tradition of which only a part was later recorded. Although there were many other writers for whom it was claimed that they were inspired and faithful scribes of the Apostles, the Church is She who did or

Mat. 28:19-20

J. Karabidopoulos, Intro. to the N.T., p. 104 (Greek)

1 There are scholars who believe that, in fact, "the writing of the three first Gospels is placed. . . around the year 70 AD."

did not recognise them, for She is unerring. The Church lived the truth of the Gospel even before anything was committed to writing, having lived with the Holy Tradition from the outset.

So then, this is the Holy Tradition: The source and the root of the two Testaments—the Old and the New—and thus the reason why we call it a source of Holy Revelation, since it carries the same weight as Holy Scripture.

Inq.: Yes, but it is said that Holy Scripture as God's word is not permitted to be substituted or exchanged with Tradition, which is man's word, as is written in the Gospel: "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition? . . . ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition. Ye hypocrites, well did Isaiah prophesy of you, saying: 'This people . . . in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrine the commandments of men." Thus, it is not necessary for us to replace or add the tradition of men to the law of God, which is contained in Holy Scripture.

Mat. 15:3, 6-9
Mk. 7:13

EC: What your friends have told you is not at all true, since the law of God is not only contained in Holy Scripture. Listen to what the divine Evangelist John says: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written. Amen." Again, the same Evangelist declares in one of his epistles: "Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full." So, you see that the holy evangelist, when he had the ability, taught his disciples more with the living voice of Tradition than by sending them epistles. While your friends keep at all costs

Jn. 21:25
2 Jn. 1:12

only so much as is written, they do not take into account that both the Saviour and the majority of His Apostles did not leave anything written, but rather taught orally, with the living voice of Tradition.

Inq.: In that case, I do not know how Christians are to understand the statement that we must not be seduced by the false teachings of men, especially those which are religious and rely on Scripture. After all, the Apostle counsels us: "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." It is our responsibility, then, to preserve ourselves from the false traditions of men.

Col. 2:8

EC: Dearest to Christ, you do not discern the difference between the teachings of human traditions and those that proceed from the apostolic and evangelical tradition. You brought here an excerpt from Holy Scripture that refers to the tradition of human teachings and pseudo philosophy that has no relationship whatsoever to the evangelical and apostolic Tradition of the Church of Jesus Christ. Holy Tradition is neither a tradition of men, nor a philosophy, nor some kind of trickery, but is the word of God that He delivered to us personally. The great Apostle Paul teaches and exhorts us to keep with vigour the traditions, saying; "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle." On the contrary, some counsel weaker Christians to slander and abandon the apostolic and evangelical traditions, without understanding that Holy Scripture itself is a fruit of the Holy Spirit that grew out of the roots and tree of Holy Tradition.

2 Thess. 2:15

Inq.: Why is Holy Scripture not sufficient for faith and

salvation without having any need whatsoever of Tradition? This appears to be the case from the words of the Apostle Paul to Timothy: "And that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." These words are clear. Any addition to Holy Scripture is unnecessary.

2 Tim. 3:15-16

EC: Here, he is speaking only about the Scripture of the Old Testament, for the New Testament had not yet been written. Paul wrote to Timothy that a good teacher could use the Old Testament for the support of his faith in Christ and his instruction in Christianity. According to the notion that you mistakenly asserted, it follows that not one book of the New Testament—from those that were written in the period that followed these epistles of the Apostle Paul to Timothy—should be accepted. Rather, it is enough for us to recognize the Old Testament books mentioned here in the passage to which you refer.

Inq.: Some people do not acknowledge the Tradition because they say that with the passing of time it yielded to many illegitimate elements so that, especially today, we are no longer able to discern the true apostolic Tradition from the false.

EC: The Church of Christ determined the truths of the faith, according to the long course of Tradition, through the teachings and canons of the holy Ecumenical Councils, decrees and the Symbol of Faith [The Creed], and with confessions [of Faith] by holy and wonderworking hierarchs such as were made at the many local synods which have been held

continuously since the days of old. At these synods, the authenticity and genuineness of the holy Orthodox Faith was firmly established, primarily therein where it was attacked by the existing heresies of the time. From the totality of such synods appears the irrevocable and inalterable content of Holy Tradition. This is understood when you examine closely the essence of the following conditions:

- Do not sanction conceptions that contain inconsistencies amongst themselves or contradictions with the apostolic Tradition and Holy Scripture. (A teaching is to be considered worthy of "Tradition" when it stems from the Saviour or the Holy Apostles and is directly under the influence of the Holy Spirit.)

- The Tradition is that which has been safeguarded from the Apostolic Church and has an uninterrupted continuity until today.

- The Tradition is that which is confessed and practiced by the entire universal Orthodox Church.

- The Tradition is that which is in harmony with the greatest portion of the fathers and ecclesiastical writers.

When a tradition does not fulfil these stipulations, it cannot be considered true and holy, and consequently cannot be considered admissible or fit to be observed.

Inq.: Notwithstanding all the efforts which you say the Orthodox Church has made and makes relative to the truth of Tradition, some believe only the teachings which are contained in Holy Scripture. For the first Christians—they say—accepted only such writings as were contained in Holy Scripture, as it is written: "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all

readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily, whether
Acts 17:11 those things were so." From this, it follows that we should keep those teachings found written in Holy Scripture.

EC: However, the great Apostle Paul commends the Christians of Corinth not because they kept the written teachings, but because they obeyed him and observed with diligence the oral teachings that they had received from him. Listen to what he writes: "Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and even as I delivered to you, ye
1 Cor. 11:2 are holding fast the traditions." I wonder, what is better to do: for us to keep only the written teachings or to follow the great Apostle Paul who extols those who keep the unwritten tradition as well? Furthermore, we have established that the Holy Apostles and Evangelists believed and preached abundantly from Holy Tradition, which they inherited from of old and is not written anywhere in Holy Scripture.

Inq.: Where, specifically, does it appear that the Holy Apostles taught other teachings aside from those which are written in Holy Scripture?

EC: Here are two testimonies: The Holy Apostle Jude in his catholic epistle, verse nine, among others, says: "But when the archangel Michael, contending with the devil, disputed about the body of Moses, he did not presume to pronounce a reviling judgement upon him, but said, The Lord rebuke
Jude 9 thee." Dearest to Christ, search all of Holy Scripture and see if you will find written this utterance. Still further down in the same epistle the Apostle refers to the prophecy of Enoch, saying: "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, to execute judgement upon all, and to convince

all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him." Yet, the Apostle Jude is not alone in speaking from Tradition. Listen to what the illustrious Paul says in his second epistle to Timothy; "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith." And again, the renowned Apostle Paul, guiding the priests of Ephesus, says: "Remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, it is more blessed to give than to receive." Now, I ask you, who insist on putting faith only in the written word, from where did the two Apostles—Jude and Paul—take the foregoing words, for you will not find them written anywhere in Holy Scripture?

Jude 14-20

2 Tim. 3:8

Acts 20:35

Inq.: Still, I question if it is possible for Holy Tradition to be preserved until today unadulterated and genuine in all respects as in the beginning? Should we not possess more assurances from the written teachings of Holy Scripture?

EC: You saw above that the famed Paul commends the Christians of Corinth for keeping, with care and mindfulness, the unwritten traditions, such as they had received from his very lips. Moreover, you heard that the Apostles Paul and Jude employed in their preaching words taken directly from Holy Tradition such as those that referred to the prophecy of Enoch and others. Further, I also pointed out to you by what means Holy Tradition was preserved throughout the ages. Furthermore, the same Apostle Paul exhorts and directs the Christians of Thessalonica to be very attentive and vigilant to keep the Holy Tradition: "Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether

2 Thess. 2:15 by word, or our epistle." And in another place, he says: "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him
Gal. 1:8 be accursed." In other words, he is speaking of the Gospel that he handed down to them with a living voice and not only by written word.

INQ.: How was this Canon of Holy Tradition in the Church preserved over the span of thousands of years? In our age, some allege that from day to day the clergy and ecclesiastical writers alter the truth of Holy Scripture and the Apostolic Tradition, which in the beginning was authentic and genuine. They say that if you have in your hand a book that was published 50 years ago and you put it next to one published recently, they would have nothing in common. It follows, then, that if the hierarchs and priests have done this with the sacred books, they would do the same with the Holy Tradition of which the Orthodox boast as having preserved unscathed from the Holy Apostles.

EC: That which your companions have accepted is not at
Mat. 10:17-20
John 4:16-26
1 Tim. 3:15 all correct. The teachings of the Church of Christ are safeguarded by the Holy Spirit and cannot err. Its very founder, Jesus Christ governs it in an unseen way, until the end of
Mat. 28:20 the ages. If some ecclesiastical writers, hierarchs, priests or laity translated the Bible from another language or amended some passage of which an expression does not correspond to the present-day speech of our people, this would be an adjustment and modification of expression and not a serious alteration of the substance of the Biblical text. If today a Romanian from the time of the Elder Mirtsea or Stephan the Great (1504) were resurrected and you wanted to speak with him, you would understand him with difficulty, the lan-

guage having developed, no longer being exactly that which was spoken then. That is exactly what happened regarding the books. With the passage of time the writers' words or expressions were amended with suitable present-day language without, however, changing the meaning of the profound and sacred writings. Previously, I referred you to the foundation upon which Holy Tradition rests and by what means the preservation of its authentic original image is ensured and is conveyed through the ages. This refers to, namely, the ancient Symbol of Faith (The Creed), the apostolic canons and the dogmatic decisions of the seven[2] Ecumenical Councils. To these can also be added the following monumental and meaningful testaments—assurances of the unimpaired preservation of the Holy Tradition:

+104 AD

+106 AD

Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History, Bk 2:36

- The acts of the early Church, the witnesses of the company of the apostles, amongst whom are Saint Ignatius the God-bearer, a disciple of the Apostles and Saint Polycarp of Smyrna. These Fathers admonished the faithful of their day to safeguard themselves from the teachings of heretics and to maintain in the full only the Apostolic Tradition.

Eusebius of Caesarea, Ecclesiastical History, Bk 4:8

- Hegessipus, Eusebius tells us, attempted to collect the whole of the apostolic traditions and nearly managed it, gathering more than five books worth of material that Eusebius studied. Unfortunately, with the passage of time, these books were eventually lost.

2 The Elder here is referring to the well-known seven Oecumenical Councils, however, in essence the Church also accepts an eighth (879), which confirmed the rejection of the "filioque" clause in the presence and with the support of the Church of Rome, and a ninth (1341), which rejected the humanistic-scholastic theology of Barlaam in support of the Hesychasts and St. Gregory Palamas. The truths expounded by these two councils have helped to uphold the Church against the theological distortions which have been brought to bear over the past 650 years, first in the West, and soon thereafter in the East.

+202 AD
+215 AD

Stromatis, pg 7

- Saint Irenaeus and Clement of Alexandria inform us: "Those who explain Scripture without the help of the Church's Tradition cut asunder the significance of truth." Behold, further, those brilliant witnesses representing the faith of apostolic times and the period immediately following it up until the fourth century. The acts of the ancient Church are an important testimony to the value of the Holy Tradition and honour shown it from those times until today.

+250 AD

- Origen says: "Preserve the Holy Tradition in the Church."

+403 AD

- St. Epiphanios writes: "It is necessary to hold to the Tradition because it is not possible for everything to be found in Holy Scripture. The Holy Apostles handed down some things via the written word, while others via the spoken."

+407 AD

4th Homily on 2 Thess.; see verse 2:45

- Saint John Chrysostom says: "Hence it is clear that the Holy Apostles did not deliver everything by epistle; rather many things they handed down via the spoken word which is also trustworthy. If there is the Tradition, then do not ask for anything more."

+394 AD
Against Eunomius, Book 40

- Saint Gregory of Nyssa writes: "We have the Tradition set out for us from the Fathers like an inheritance by apostolic succession and transmitted via the saints."

+379 AD

On the Holy Spirit

- Saint Basil the Great in his writings provides similar testimony. Here is how he expresses it: "Among the dogmas and *kerygma* (evangelical truths) that are safeguarded in the Church, some we have from the written teachings while others we have received orally from the Tradition of the Apostles by a concealed succession. The later hold the same legitimacy and force as the written texts."

We must uphold with great reverence and godliness Holy Tradition since all that is needful to effect our salvation is not found within Holy Scripture. Holy Scripture instructs us to do many things; however, it does not make manifest to us the light. For example, it instructs us to be baptized, but it does not explain to us the method. Likewise, it guides us to confess our sins, receive communion, be crowned (married)—but nowhere does it specify the rite of carrying-out these *mysterion* (sacraments). Furthermore, it instructs us to pray, but does not tell us how, where and when. It tells us to make the sign of the Holy Cross in front of our chest according to the psalmist, "Lord, lift Thou up the light of Thy countenance upon us," but it does not show us how. Who teaches us in writing to worship facing east? Where in Scripture are we told the words of the *epiclesis* (invocation) of the Holy Spirit for the sanctification of the all-holy Mysteries? Which teaching from Holy Scripture instructs us to bless the water of Baptism and the holy Unction of Holy Chrismation? Which passage in Scripture teaches us about the threefold denunciation and the renunciations of Satan before Holy Baptism? The prayer of glorification toward the Holy Trinity—"Glory to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit"—from which passage did it come to us? Posing these questions to the slanderer of Tradition, Saint Basil the Great says: "If we consent to abandon the unwritten traditions on the pretext that they do not have great worth, we err in great and elevated matters, rejecting the Gospel."

The Rudder, Neamts Monastery, 1844, Canons 87, 91

The ordering, therefore, by which the Church upholds the unwritten is: whatever is of apostolic descent and is practiced by the Fathers receives the validity of tradition and has the power of law in the Church of Christ. Accordingly, therefore, it must be safeguarded since its importance and benefit springs from the relationship that exists between it and Holy

Scripture. It is true that both have remained within a reciprocal unity and intimate relationship—a relationship based on the fact that both comprise the holy revelation of God and for us are the fount and source of Revelation. Hence, it is not possible for there to exist an inner contradiction between the two or for us to exclude one from the other. Holy Scripture possesses its unique witness of the scriptural canon and its dogmatic character (its divine inspiration) only in and with Holy Tradition, while Holy Tradition is able to prove the authenticity of its truth only together with Holy